



# Working their Way

By OCTAVE THANET



ARE you hungry, dear?" said Agatha. "Awful!" answered Dorothy, as one whose feelings are beyond the trammels of grammar.

At this they both laughed. "It's curious," Dorothy continued, "how different it is to be hungry when you are going to have something to eat—and when you aren't!"

Agatha sighed. "I don't see," she reflected, "how we were both so crazy as to carry all our—our all as the novelists say, in our bags. And then to lose those bags! Of course, we left them in the train when we changed cars. And after Brother James had so warned us—I don't see how I could have been so stupid—but I was!"

"Wouldn't Jim be—intolerable, you know," continued Agatha, "if he were to find out! Yet it isn't so much to lose, really; I was down to twenty odd dollars; I know because I had been so careful to carry the big notes in my secret pocket, and I took them all out to pay for that Hepplewhite table; and it didn't seem worth while to put back only two notes; so I was carrying them in my bag."

"I did that very thing," said Dorothy, "but oh, dear, mine was fifty!" Then, with sudden inspiration, "we might pawn our jewelry," she said. "We've got some rings and our watches with us."

But Agatha shook a gloomy head. "You forget that there's no pawn-shop in this out-of-the-way village—it would be a desecration to this prime old street."

"Well, there's one thing don't let us do if we have to go without all three meals; don't let us wire to brother. He was so sure that it was foolish in us to go poking off to a New England village for antique furniture. Don't you remember how he insisted on our taking Therese or Amelia and prophesied we should be sending him a wire for money or a trained nurse or to get us out of the jail, or—something; and you said they wouldn't receive a telegram of distress from us unless it were a matter of life and death? Let's not give in!"

"That's the spirit!" exclaimed Agatha, embracing her. "We'll find a way out."

Dorothy knitted her brows. Very lovely dark brows they were, darker than her dark-brown hair. Their thick dusky arch and her long black eyelashes gave her violet eyes something of mystery and appeal and made the sweetness of her face plaintive. She was very slender, too slender—and there was a touch of languor in her graces. Indeed, Dorothy's health had given her sister anxious hours of late. The girl grew paler and thinner all the time; she was easily tired, and she was far too docile when the doctor put balls and dinner dances under the ban.

He had known Dorothy all her life and he fumed over her apathy. Then he turned very serious. "The fact is," said he soberly, "you very rich people all live unnaturally stupid lives. Now you've got to think of something different enough from what you've been doing to catch her interest for long enough to put a few pounds of flesh on her bones."

"You mean a trip,—she and I—with no one but a maid?"

"Just yourselves, without a maid. Give her something to do if it's only her hair!" And he was gone, irritably chewing his cigar. He had not suspected any clue to Dorothy's unhappiness—or spared her the mention if he did suspect. But Agatha knew. She knew that Dorothy had made a hero of their distant cousin, Ned Wentworth, ever since they were children together and he had saved her from the mad dog. The year after he graduated from Harvard they had suddenly broken off the correspondence which had flourished during the whole of his college course. And Agatha one day came across a charred bunch of newspaper notices in her sister's fireplace about the famous football quarterback, the promising young reformer, the brilliant young lawyer. This was only a little while before the doctor's talk. Agatha put up a brave front to her father and her brother. But inwardly, she was as aroused as the doctor.

The sisters went to Massachusetts together, on a search for some wonderful old furniture, among it no less than a Hepplewhite 'scrutoir given by Horace Walpole himself to Philip Wentworth, one time governor, and descending through him and a long line of Colonial worthies to Mrs. Hannah Wentworth Prentice, who being stricken in years, with no offspring left her, announced in the public prints, that she would sell her furniture to any descendants of the old governor who could pay her price and satisfy her ideas of their fitness to Colonial furniture.

Therefore, they had come to the old home of the Wentworths; and, as it happened, they had sheltered themselves under the roof tree of Mrs. Love-Prentice, daughter-in-law to Madam Prentice of the furniture. For two days Agatha had submitted to Madam Prentice's inspection, herself only covertly inspecting the furniture. By that time the Westerners felt a sense of isolation and chilly distrust. They were rather glad to go to Boston and hunt furniture. It was on their return to the village the preceding forenoon that they had lost all their money.

Agatha had paid Mrs. Prentice in advance for the lodging so the sisters felt sure of a roof over their heads for at least a week. They had been getting their meals at the restaurant the village boasted, paying for each meal as they got it.

Naturally, under the circumstances they had not lunched nor dined—nor breakfasted. Now Agatha looked anxiously at her delicate sister. "Don't you worry, sweetheart," she said brightly, "only, go immediately back to bed. You'll see. I'll fetch you something in a little while." As she spoke she was

moving rapidly about the room, laying out some furs and a number of dainty toilet articles. "Hurry!" she cried, "I hear some one coming."

Dorothy had that most marvelous of virtues among modern maidens—obedience. Without a question she sped into her own room.

But she left the door ajar and she could see Mrs. Prentice's lean and stooping figure and her broom.

Mrs. Prentice took a single step and then, unexpectedly burst into speech. "My! what lovely furs!" she cried. She took another step; and added before her shyness had time to choke her, "They are just what I've been wanting to buy my Cathie. She's down to Boston, you know. Are they—please excuse me, but are they awful expensive?"

"Not these," replied Agatha, smiling, "oddly enough, these furs are for sale. I'm trying to dispose of them for a lady who has had a good deal of money but is in great straits, at present; I really fear the poor thing has actually gone hungry, sometimes. (Rather, acquiesced Dorothy, mutely.) So the furs are a simply ridiculous bargain." (She hesitated; Dorothy who divined her purpose now, knew that she was wondering how low she dared to offer them.) "I think she would take thirty dollars. And I know she must have paid over a hundred."

Mrs. Prentice was absorbed in mental arithmetic. "It seems awful," she faltered, "the poor starving creature! But I—I'm afraid that would be too much for me. I thought if they were twenty-five—or or twenty-six, fifty—"

"Sold at twenty-six, fifty, to Mrs. Prentice," said Agatha glibly, and she would have pushed the furs

But Agatha was still calm at her guns. She actually clapped her hands together in an artless glee, exclaiming: "How perfectly lovely! Let us camp out together in this charming house. We will gladly pay you just what we promised the other lady; and cook for ourselves; and we may send to Boston, mayn't we and get things; they can go on to the furs, you know until they are used up; and we'll pay for the board at the end of the week; unless you would prefer that in advance?" finished Agatha with a fine careless air that took Dorothy's breath away.

"Of course not," faltered Mrs. Prentice, "but—do you know how to cook?"

Dorothy chuckled to herself. Her sister who was not only a famous entertainer, but who had been commended by great chefs for her direct, personal triumphs with chafing-dish and salad bowl; did she "know how to cook?" Agatha, however, remained modest and undisturbed. "Let me show you," said she, "my sister isn't really well enough to go out for her breakfast; I will go down and make her a cup of coffee and boil her an egg, this minute. There is nothing like sampling things."

Mrs. Prentice looked appealingly at this masterful lodger who would be a boarder, with or without her consent. "Please, please don't you think I'm ungrateful—but—but don't you see? Madam Prentice has a young man invited to take Thanksgiving dinner—"

"With her?"

"No ma'am, with me. She's just sent over word that he is coming to look at some furniture. He is a very rich and tasteful young man, and she thinks he will do to sell the secretary to and other things; so

more; come on let us try the coffee." She propelled Mrs. Prentice out of the room; then like a flash darted back and into Dorothy's; turned on her sister one scintillating smile, and hugged her.

Dorothy burst into hysterical laughter. But in a moment she was out of bed and briskly arranging the room, packing away Agatha's tempting display. By dint of refolding many times, she secured a very creditable imitation of her maid's neat packing. At this point she sat down; she felt a little faint. "People don't think enough of the hungry!" said she solemnly. But she turned a smile of resolute cheerfulness toward the door which was opening; and the cheerfulness merged into wild delight, when Agatha entered with a tray on which were displayed a steaming pot of coffee, a rasher of bacon, a plate of toast and the whitest and largest of eggs.

"Now, eat slowly and a little at a time," said Agatha, "starving people must be careful. Give me some in the toothbrush mug; she thinks I've had my breakfast at the restaurant. Dodo we have got the job! Three meals a day and corking fun! Are you with me?"

"Agatha, you are great!" cried Dorothy; "so's the bacon! I never had such a delicious meal in my life. Isn't this the loveliest Thanksgiving ever was?"

Mrs. Prentice, trembling with quite a new kind of excitement was watching Dorothy put the last touches on a table utterly unlike any within her experience.

"Don't it look beautiful!" she murmured to Dorothy. "I never did expect to see such a table in my house; and all that old pewter you spent such a time polishing up—why it looks grand; and your sister, she's real capable! She said we had to have candies and yellow candies and so you sugared the orange peel and put a yellow frosting on the marshmallows we got at the store; but the ice-cream is the best of all!"

"You mean our putting it into the pumpkin since you hadn't any mold?"

"Of course, and it was you who thought of that and putting blanched almonds in for seeds. It's going to be a lovely dinner! And I'll confess to you, it's the first time in my life I've ever had Madam Prentice take a meal with me and not been scared to death. You see she is so capable! And I always feel her eyes boring into things. I do hope she'll decide to sell that furniture to you instead of to the young man!"

"Well, even Madam Prentice might be proud of such a beautiful table as this!" said Dorothy.

"It does look nice," agreed Mrs. Prentice, "and you, you do look just too cute for anything! That waist of your sister's fits you like it was made for you; and all those things she had sent up from Jordan Marsh—well they do dress a hired girl up, don't they? I guess Madam Prentice will stare. It was certainly good of you and your sister not to mind if I asked Cathie's beau and his aunt. Oh, I hope you ain't scared."

Was it the shy Dorothy who answered "Not a bit?" She couldn't believe in herself. "It's too good to be true," she confessed to Agatha, who was in the tumultuous last stages of dinner with pots and pans on every available spot of table or stove.

"I don't know why I'm not scared; I fancy it is because poor Mrs. Prentice is so much more terrified than I ever was."

"You look fetching enough to make our hated rival fall in love with you," said Agatha. "When we get home you remind me that I'm never to be cross at cook for getting into a huddle just before dinner." The tinkle of the door-bell reminded Dorothy that her part in this little domestic scene was beginning. She went to the door because the guests were arriving in a body. Madam Prentice entered first. She was not tall but so erect that she gave the beholder an impression of height. She wore a bristling black silk and a most impressive black "front" and white turban. Her eyes were piercing and had been fine. Miss Akers, the aunt, was a stout spinster who did not look formidable. The lover, himself, was short and fair and rather nervous. Dorothy waited on them with her best imitation of her own French maid's assiduous politeness and accent. She was in the hall laden with the ladies' wraps when the door opened and the fourth member of the party, who had tarried to speak with the driver of the hack which had fetched them, entered the hall.

He was Edward Wentworth.

She looked at him full, and did not flinch. How could she? There was the dinner to be served; there were poor Mrs. Prentice's pathetic hopes of pleasing her daughter's lover and his powerful aunt—no, she did not flinch. With Therese's accent to the fore she offered to take his hat and coat. He blushed up to his eyes.

"Certainly not," he stammered. His hand went out to snatch away her burden of wraps, then fell to his side. He walked away. In truth, Ned Wentworth's senses were staggering. He was utterly confounded by his cousin's appearance.

Dorothy's first impulse was to tell Agatha in the kitchen, but she remembered that Agatha was dishing up the dinner, very flushed if not nervous; and she could not add a feather's weight to her cares.

"We really ought to think more of the cook's feelings," reflected Dorothy, and she smiled on Agatha who was pushing the turkey through an uncertain slide.

"Hold it up!" commanded the chef, "it's a simply abominable concern likely to tumble at any minute! Prop it up with this piece of kindling-wood! How's the dinner going? Did they say anything about the green sauce?"

"One of the gentlemen said it was delicious; he



THERE SAT THE PRETTY MAID AND THE COOK

into Mrs. Prentice's arms, but she, protestingly, deprecatingly, waved the softly shining, fluffy temptation aside.

"Please no," she apologized, "you see, I've just handed out all the cash I had on hand for the church debt. Do you think the lady would mind waiting until the first of next month?"

Agatha was reckoned "a good loser," she took this staggering blow in a way to win Dorothy's admiration amid her disappointment.

"Why, surely not," she returned heartily, "I will advance the money; and"—she illumined the situation with a charming smile, "a delightful solution occurs to me; why not take my sister and me to board; and we shall pay you instead of you paying us; and you will have the furs to the bargain."

But with actual tears in her eyes, Mrs. Prentice shook her head. "I'm so sorry, but I couldn't. I haven't any girl. Her mother is dreadful sick and she went this morning. I hadn't a word to say; but it was hard. I ain't very much of a cook and I know I couldn't suit you."

as she didn't feel well enough to have him to dinner so she sent word she'd come over here; and she'd lend me her grandfather's glasses, maybe he'd buy them. But—I was going to send her word I wasn't going to have Thanksgiving dinner this year; only if I had you boarding—"

Agatha did not flinch, difficulties were a stimulus to her daring spirit.

"Of course you'll have to have, her, too!" she cried why not? and the young man, too. I shall like to see our rival in the furniture trade."

"But—the dinner? I might get an accommodator from Boston but you see she mightn't like—she is pretty pernickety you know—she might object—"

Mrs. Prentice halted wretchedly the tears rose to her faded eyes.

"Might object to us, you mean," Agatha supplied the hiatus in the cheerfulness of tones. "But she won't need to see us; we'll be the accommodators. There are people who come in to accommodate, I was told of them yesterday. We'll accommodate. I'll cook the dinner; Dorothy will wait on table. You can ask some

hadn't eaten such a thing since his last dinner at the Café St. Martin."

And Dorothy spoke so easily that Agatha, for all her shrewdness detected nothing. The dinner proceeded in orderly triumph. Dorothy overheard Mrs. Prentice saying, with true New England evasion to congratulation: "Well, I'm sorry to say, she is only borrowed; she is an accommodator whom I got for to-day. The cook is an accommodator, too. I was lucky, don't you think?"

"I think I'd like their addresses, if you please, Millicent," boomed Mrs. Prentice's deep voice, "these pies are something wonderful; so was the frozen cheese and the aspic jelly."

"The others were hers, but the pies—" Mrs. Prentice was radiant—"the pies were from your own recipe and I made them myself."

Madame Prentice nodded her acquiline profile with more sign of approval than her daughter-in-law ever had seen. She turned the conversation to the water goblets of rock-crystal curiously cut with facets gleaming like diamonds. She had loaned them to Millicent, she said, with a gracious smile. Never before had she shown such condescension. Mrs. Prentice sat like one in a happy dream.

It was with suppressed exultation combined with gratitude, that as soon as dinner was over, she made the first opportunity to go to the pantry and look through the slide into the kitchen. There sat the pretty maid and the cook whose white gown was protected by the most voluminous and brettled of aprons which being protected by nothing in turn, had suffered from the eccentricities of the coal-range and the sportive nature of eggs. But her brilliant eyes and flushed cheeks made her as handsome as the trim maid. Dishes were stacked in all directions—on the tables, in the sink, on the pantry shelves. The sacred De Witt Clinton set, however, had been washed, and stood safely to one side.

A snatch of conversation floated to Mrs. Prentice. "And to think that we used to think our maids dallied so forever over their meals—why, it's such a relief to sit down. I think we were too hard—I mean I was too hard. I'm afraid the cellar stairs were too steep, too. I am going to see that they are altered."

Mrs. Prentice bent to speak through the slide. Unhappy eagerness of her gratitude! The ancestral goblets were on the shelf; the lady's movement dislodged the protecting prop of kindling-wood; in the swift slide of the guillotine, a sickening, sinister crash! Both sisters sprang to their feet; they saw the wreckage; they noted Mrs. Prentice's whitening face. Dorothy ran around into the pantry; she pushed into a heap the splinters of two of the glasses.

"This way, Mr. Wentworth, this way," a full-voiced voice proclaimed, preceding the stately figure of Madam Prentice, "here's the china closet. Millicent will excuse my bringing you in here. Millicent, where are those glasses?"

Agatha heard the voice. She realized part of the awful situation, but saw no chance for her own entry into the tragedy; one thing she could do; she did it; with all her weight she hung on to the slide and kept the screen firm between the world and her own untidy kitchen. "Dorothy will have to save that miserable Mrs. Prentice," thought she, "I can't."

Dorothy seemed equal to her task. She had flung her napkin over the wreck; she was asking in the meekest voice was there anything Madam wished.

"Here's one," said Madam Prentice, "if you want a wedding gift, you couldn't do better."

"Pardon, madam," Dorothy's silvery, humble tones again slid into the pause. "Pardon, but if these most beautiful glasses are for sell, I know a lady will buy, pay what you like—unless, of course, monsieur, he wish."

She looked quite calmly full into Wentworth's perturbed face; he gasped.

"Why yes, yes, unless the lady—was it fifty dollars?" "Fifty dollars; and I prefer to sell to you," retorted Madam Prentice, "you've got the 'scrutoir and you can have these."

"I do them up and give to the gentleman?" softly, sadly spoke Dorothy.

"Yes," said Madam Prentice.

Mrs. Prentice said not a word. By degrees the color ebbed back into her face. But not until Madam Prentice's magnificent back had creaked and shimmered away and Wentworth had returned to close the pantry door, murmuring, "I must see you! When?"

And Dorothy had murmured back: "Later,—after they go. Thank you."

Not until this last moment did Mrs. Prentice summon breath to voice an intolerable relief, "Oh, you good, good, brave smart young girl! Oh, will he let me pay him for the smashed ones?"

"Dear no," laughed Dorothy, so handsome that it took Agatha's breath away, as she caught the vision of her through the uplifted slide, "dear, no; he isn't going to buy them, we are! And we are going to make you a present of them."

"Oh, ain't she the cutest thing?" sighed Mrs. Prentice, out of a full heart.

According to immemorial New England rural custom, the dinner had been in the early afternoon; but the lamps were lighted as Agatha left her clean and shining kitchen, and smiling, though weary, bade Mrs. Prentice good-night, and went up-stairs. She paused only a moment at the door of their own little parlor. She had opened it unobserved by the youth and maiden within who were blind to everything but the enchanted journey into their own hearts which they were taking; she gazed for a second on them both.

Dorothy spoke; her voice held a new sweetness. "Such a happy, happy Thanksgiving!" she said. "I didn't think of the thanks, though. I was so busy trying to make it go off and make the poor things happy!"

"What better way to return thanks—to make people happy? And to think," cried the young fellow remorsefully, "that I ever thought you were like a beautiful Venetian vase, exquisite and frail and hard. But now—Oh, Dorothy, is it too soon?"

Very softly, the older sister closed the door. "I seem," said she with rather a wistful smile, "to have been more of an accommodator than I expected."

NEXT WEEK: Amandy Higginson's Admirers  
By Morley Roberts